Kennedy Disowns Unit To Draft Him in 1976

By Jules Witcover 4-26-75
Washington Post Staff Writer

The first "Draft Ted Kennedy" committee of the early blooming 1976 presidential campaign season has been formed—and immediately disowned by its would-be beneficiary.

The organizers are Burton G. Wilkins, a Lynn, Mass., accountant; his wife, Ellen; and Wilkins' brother-in-law, Charles W. Evans.

Wilkins acknowledged yesterday he does not know Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) personnally and has not talked to him about the committee, but said he had discussed it with a Kennedy aide he declined to identify.

Richard Drayne, Kennedy's press secretary, said the senator knew nothing about the committee. He said Kennedy still stood by his statement of last September declaring he would not be a candidate in 1976 for the Democratic presidential nomination and would discourage any attempts to make him one. Last night, Kennedy sent Wilkins a letter asking him to dissolve the committee and instead channel his efforts into Kennedy's campaign for re-election to the Senate next year.

Wilkins announced formation of the committee in a letter appealing for funds to place Kennedy cdelegate slates on the Democratic presidential primary in Massachusetts and other states.

He was taking the action, he said, "because it will be good for the country," and was going forward whether Kennedy approved or not.

Wilkins said he was taking Kennedy at his word that he would not be an active candidatt, and in fact agreed that he should not be in the primaries because "he might be injured."

He was proceeding without Kennedy's blessing, he said, ecause "there will be a lot of people in Massachusetts and across the country writing Edward Kennedy's name in the primary. Though the senator certainly has the right not to run," he said, "we have the right to vote for him, and have delegates representing our views at the convention."